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ABSTRACT

In an address delivered to the Council of Administrators of Special Education (1974), specific problems and resources for change in the education of minority and poor children are examined. The author points out the high proportion of minority and poor children in special education classes and stresses the need to change educational practice so that students with equal potential have an equal chance to grow regardless of racial differences. The root of the problem is defined as a prevalence of monolingual and monocultural educators in a multilingual and multicultural environment. Sample problems stemming from misassessment, inappropriate labeling, and inadequate teaching skills are explored, and learning patterns of Black people (such as a preference for inferential reasoning) which are not taken into account in conventional curriculum are listed. Recommendations for change include the need for mainstream professionals to consult literature on the minority perspective, and the need for leader-administrators to enlist the help of minority professionals. (LS)

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SPECIAL RESPONSES TO SPECIAL CONCERNS

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In a front-page column of the *Washington Post* on March 31, 1974, I found the following information:

> "Children in Virginia's seven state training schools are making less progress in reading and arithmetic for each month they spend in school and many are falling farther behind. The State's first achievement tests of these pupils shows:
>
> . . . The poor achievement results in Virginia were recorded in the face of relatively high per pupil expenditures for academic and vocational education in the training schools.
>
> . . . The tests results are discouraging also because specialists in the education of delinquent children regard the average training school commitment of six to eight months a rare opportunity to make a leap forward in a child's academic achievement levels."

David Kirp (*HER* February, 1974) stated:

> "Research concerning classes for children with etiologically more ambiguous handicaps—the educable mentally retarded, mildly emotionally disturbed, and perceptually handicapped—reach quite different conclusions. Those programs do not tangibly benefit their students, whose equally handicapped counterparts placed in regular

school classes perform at least as well and without apparent detriment to their normal classmates.

"It is indeed paradoxical that mentally handicapped children having teachers especially trained, having more money (per capita) spent on their education, and being enrolled in classes with fewer children and a program designed to provide for their unique needs, should be accomplishing the objectives of their education at the same or a lower level than similar mentally handicapped children who have not had these advantages and have been forced to remain in regular grades."

This slice of our professional practice is as appropriate as any other to illustrate the poverty of our profession when dealing with the number one problem in education today. How do we change educational practice so that students with equal potential have an equal chance to grow regardless of racial differences? Why is it that with all our man years of formal training which translates into degrees and certificates, with endless man years of research, with millions of dollars in resources, and with formally-stated commitments to help all children to learn, the basic pattern of achievement among minority and poor children in our schools remains unchanged? Our professional language gives the *illusion* that problems are being managed. We have talked about "target populations," "intervention strategies," "behavioral objectives," "parity," and yes—even "special education." And yet the pattern of minority student growth remains intact.

Several clues to our continued *frustration* and *delusions* about what *can* work can be seen. When Christopher Jencks let us off the hook in suggesting that school learning contributes little to what he defines as success, some of *us* also felt relief that *"it was not really our fault that minority children did so poorly. It was society as a whole."* What a relief after a decade of public criticism of schools to have another explanation for school failure.

In special education, I hear the word "mainstreaming" as the cornerstone of new jargon. And yet, I get the uneasy feeling that we have been here before. The physical placement alone of a child in the "mainstream" without a re-definition of "deficit" or "handicap" and without a clear goal of helping students to *be* mainstream rather than to *be in* the mainstream will simply be more of the same. Naturally, some handicaps are real and require special strategies for help. You can't restore sight to the blind. But why don't the numbers or proportions of students (particularly) minority students get reduced in special programs where "handicaps" can be

helped? *What is our teaching effect?* Are we doomed eternally to finding the same high proportion of minorities and poor in classes for the retarded, educationally handicapped, or emotionally disturbed? If this is to be the case, then what is so special about special education?

I have no desire or intent here to beat you across the head with the catalog of ills for your or my theraputic purposes. I have some hope that things can be different. Therefore, my look at us is intended to be both diagnostic and prescriptive to the extent that that is possible. I believe that many answers to educational problems will become apparent if we have a clear view of what is really happening. This will help those who are willing and able to bite the bullet and do a job. At that point, those who are unwilling or unable will deserve what they surely will get. Therefore my discussion here is in two simple pieces. What are our specific problems? What are our resources for change?

Our Problems

Pervasive patter of inequity, racism, and oppression in our culture as a whole impact upon the school environment as well as what we may do as educators. However, we should be able to claim some expertise in handling school effects. We are not responsible for everything, but we are responsible for something. In that regard, I believe that the root of our problem within that domain over which we exercise some influence is that we have mostly *monolingual and monocultural educators* in a *multilingual and multicultural environment.* No real progress is possible until this is changed. I must spend some time to make this explicit for I find that many educators will hear such a conclusion and relegate it to the realm of rhetoric. This relegation is a frequently-used professional defense mechanism—an avoidance reaction in the face of what is seen to be an overwhelming problem. Let's look at samples of our problem under three categories: general, teaching skills, and curriculum.

General

Misassessment. The record of assessment in general and of minorities in particular by our educational establishment in general has been disastrous. It has been shot through with an irrelevant, unreal, and useless mechanistic and atomistic perspective stemming from the American mechanical and economic models of reality. We attempt to objectify subjective things to make them value free. Even our professional writing style attempts to move the writer from the first person to the third person, as if it were really possible to be value-free objective. These theoretical perspectives have often left

products and results which should be labeled "unfit for human consumption." Examples will follow. A second reason for the poor assessment record is the bias and pervading ethnocentricism of assessors themselves, not simply the instruments used. To be specific, the historical record contains clear and unmistakable leaps and rushes to judgment especially where minority people are concerned. This is reflected in our "special education student population."

Evidence such as the Heber study in Milwaukee and others show what *skilled* and *inspired* teaching can do to make up for oppression. New studies in cultural anthropology and linguistics also show the assessment of those who see only deficits in minority children to be incompetent. Even our common sense might lead us to ask such basic questions as the following: Why do children all over the world learn their native language at almost the same age? Why are there no differences among infants up to the age of two on tests of ability? Why are there more Black males than Black females in classes for the retarded or educationally handicapped if I.Q. differences are racial, not sexual? Why do some teachers succeed where others fail with the same groups of children? Why are untrained high school tutors in San Francisco Bay Area Schools able to teach "unteachable," "failing," "delinquent," "non-attending," low-I.Q., Black students to read two years and more above their starting point in one year with only 36 hours per semester of instruction when the schools could not do the job in seven or eight years with all their resources? Why is there virtually no professional literature on the many pockets of school success (achievement) with minority students? From Johntz (Dade County, Florida) we can see that there is not only the problem of misassessment but also a problem of educators having selective perception of facts before our very eyes. Broad attention to these and similar questions would of necessity lead us to approach minority children in ways very different than when we start from hypothesized deficits.

As I see it, the common denominator for all of our assessment failures is that assessors are estranged from the context which they seek to measure. How else, for example, could a major research corporation recently suggest that a Black child's I.Q. might be indicated by his ability to understand puns, a form of humor which is clearly (to anyone who really knows or understands Black people) alien and culture-specific to Whites. Only from those who brought us such concepts as Columbus "discovering" America could be so naively ethnocentric. No legitimacy can be given to those educators who have not demonstrated an empathic experiential understanding of the monorities observed and an empathic un-

derstanding of schools and classrooms. Economists, many sociologists, psychologists, and management types have too long been given the center of the stage to talk about teaching/learning processes when they are ignorant of most relevant classroom data beyond their own experiences as a student, their own unsystematically-examined university "teaching" experience, or a tourist's view of schools and professional literature. Why else would someone look to Coleman, Jencks, Mounihan, Jensen, or certain non-educationally experienced large research corporations for help in understanding how schools can help minorities? Their bias or naivete is bad enough. But their dull and poverty-stricken domain of experience raises the issue of their competence to deal with matters of how students learn. It must be another kind of avoidance of the real when those of us who know schools give credence to such false prophets. For example, why do so many of us recognize the names above and so few recognize the names of Robert Williams, Robert Green, William Labov, Joan Baratz, Marcus Foster, John Collier, William Johntz, Richard Heber, etc. Your professional I.Q. expressed as a ratio is equal the number of names you know in the first list divided by the number of names you know in the second list times one hundred. Or should we simply move on? As special educators, you may or may not do research. However, all of us do consume and depend upon research results, using them routinely in our daily work.

Shoddy Categories, Labels, Classifications. When the system of education as a whole systematically is incompetent to deal with minorities, confidence in treasured categories should suffer. What is "minimal brain dysfunction," really? What is an "educational handicap," really? What are "emotional disturbances," really? I submit that especially where minorities are concerned we have really only described resultant behavior which is symptomatic of the real problem which we appear to define by the term applied but do not define at all. The tangled description of our catchall category minimal brain dysfunction is the best example. Further, what is "teaching," "learning," "supervision," "observation?" We need to be held strictly accountable for our language. The main reasons are, in addition to communication, that shoddy language is an invitation to the projection of an educator's ethnocentricism and the labeling which results is oppressive to school children who become its victims. Labels and categories must be more than ways of dividing up the turf, or the spoils, among ourselves. Building specializations for the sake of professional protection cannot condone or endure the oppression which results from the application of meaningless or fuzzy categories.

"D and R" Models. Harold Bordy once jokingly spoke of D and R models as characterizing much in the area of educational research which provides us with our essential information for decision making. He suggested that in education, names and use of concepts come first. Then, in typical cart-before-the-horse fashion, research is begun to tell what should go under the name. Proceed with extreme caution with new and old remedies in special education!

Teaching Skills. While for some this next characterization may be painful, I believe that a useful conceptual scheme already exists for looking at teaching skills. The scheme which I would choose is the scheme which we use for looking at children's behaviors who are our principal clientele. Someone will protest that this scheme is invalid when looking at teachers or other educators. I feel that it is as valid for us as it is for the children which we serve. Perhaps a few liberties will be taken in my interpretations, but I am deadly serious. We can talk of individual educators in the language of special education categories in terms of "physical," "mental," and "emotional handicaps;" and under only one area of strength, if we use conventional special education terminology—and I think that we must.

Blind educators—Most teachers fail to see visual stimuli, distort visual stimuli, or fail to integrate and interpret them properly when viewing minority children. Ralph Ellison, in the "Invisible Man," describes this phenomenon in rich clinical detail. The problem is not that the Black man or other minorities was invisible, but that the culture was either myopic or blind. With minority children, their blindness includes "paralanguage" as well. Luther Weems (1974) has spoken incisively on this subject. If teachers cannot "see" what Luther Weems "sees" for each minority child in his or her unique context, his competence must be in doubt:

> "A behavioral pattern which blends the oral tradition and the people orientation is the interactional pattern of 'call and response.' This is a part of the oral aspect as well. The most colorful example of the call and response pattern is found in the traditional, fundamentalist church where the preacher's monologue is transformed into a litany. You don't find situations where black persons are sitting up dispensing wisdom and other blacks are passively absorbing it. It is an on-going interaction. At least, you're saying: 'That's right,' 'Right on,' 'Amen,' 'Get down,' 'Shut up,' 'Get out of here,' 'We don't want to hear that,' 'Do it.' There is a communication that is going on, a kind of litany that is going on. The black

> church is a classic example of it; but the Civil Rights days aren't that far back, and you probably saw them on TV. As soon as the black speaker got up in a rousing emotional sort of way, it suddenly became a shared communication between all people present—it wasn't just the speaker dropping ideas out. The same pattern is found in most gatherings where emotionally stimulating communications are occuring. There is an on-going system of verbal reinforcement. One characteristic which has been observed to occur in classroom settings is the greater conversational and discussional pattern characteristic of the black teacher/black student interaction. This alternative to the more passive requirements of the classroom participation results in one of the most common complaints about the black child's behavior. One of the most common complaints coming from non-black teachers of black children is the alleged hyperactivity of black children. This hyperactivity has been theorized as being anything from inadequate impulse control to a diagnostic index of organic brain damage. More frequently than not, it is an adaptive boredom in response to the low activity level of the traditional classroom; a revolt against the passive absorption which is necessary for learning in these settings.

The above represents a norm for some black children, even today. This paralanguage, like language, is grounded in a cultural experience. True "sight" for an educator can come only from immersion in that experience.

Deaf educators—Teachers of minority and poor children tend to be hard of hearing and sometimes totally deaf. A practical example was just given to one by a Los Angeles teacher who noted that most of the treatment group who were being seen by specialists in speech correction were minority students. Of these, upward to 80% were identified as having problems of "articulation" where articulation often meant non-standard English pronunciation. Did you ever try the (ch) in German or to pronounce the French word *dieu* or trilling the (r) in Spanish? In addition to educators missing the auditory message on diagnosis, alien educators often miss the messages which students send over and beyond what the teacher has asked for.

MBD educators—Minimal brain dysfunction occurs in educators as with kids. Afflicted educators may appear to the un-sensitized eye to be normal in every way. And yet, unexplained and inappro-

priate responses to environmental stimuli will be apparent to the diagnostician, especially hyperactivity. The problem is that, like the dysfunction of letter reversals with kids, victim analysis is an educators' dysfunction, since the educator's behavior and the system often "produces disability." More specificity could be given; but as you know, the characteristic of this diagnostic category is its general lack of common definition at this time. Nevertheless, we will continue to use it for educators as we do with our students.

Brain damaged educators—Brain damage in educators is due to massive trauma which may be caused by extreme experiences such as placement of the educator in a school in an unfamiliar cultural setting, especially if it has minority children. Some remission may be expected provided long and skilled professional care is provided to the educator.

Educator communicative disorders—It is not at all clear how this category divides. Some aspects are physical and others emotional. The symptoms are the educator's inability to establish rapport and to establish linguistic contact with students. An especially poor prognosis occurs when the educator so afflicted is unaware of the illness. Such persons seldom respond to treatment.

Emotional handicapped educators—With emotionally handicapped educators, there are seldom presenting physical symptoms. However, there are patterns: (1) poor patterns of peer communication, (2) little or no informal communications with students, (3) the punitive use of power in such things as assignments, grading, rewards, attention, etc., and (4) bland lifestyle, etc.

Mentally retarded educators—Only a small percentage of educators are mentally retarded. When discovered, they should not teach.

Educable mentally retarded educators—A slightly larger group of educators are educable though retarded. Consideration should be given to whether they should be handled at all, handled in special institutions or classes, or should be mainstreamed.

Gifted educators—Approximately two percent of our educators can be considered as gifted. They should be carefully segregated, for it is difficult to meet their needs in heterogeneous groups of educators.

Perhaps you feel oppressed by my application of these categories to educators. If so, you are like our students. If not, you are truly disabled with severe sensory impairment. However, I feel that we must continue to use the oppressive categories for educators until they are no longer inappropriately applied to our students. My purpose with these examples is to burlesque the fact that the trouble-shooting in our educational system usually focuses on the victim and misses a vital part of the equation.

Curriculum as a Source of our Problem. What we do in schools is designed to serve the mythical average American child. Contrary to stated professional ideology, we conceive that average child the norm of our culture and process all students in the same program. Our schools have no vital need to know who and where the students are. If we did, schools would be different places. How does the school serve students like these:

1. Black people tend to prefer to respond to and with "Gestalts" rather than to or with atomistic things. Enough particulars are tolerated to get a general sense of things. There is an impatience with unnecessary specifics. Sometimes it seems that the predominant pattern for mainstream America is the preoccupation with particulars along with a concomitant loss of a sense of the whole. There is the belief that anything can be divided and subdivided into minute pieces and that these pieces add up to a whole. Therefore, dancing and music can be taught by the numbers. Even art is sometimes taught this way. This is why some Whites never learn to dance. They are too busy counting and analyzing.

2. Black people tend to prefer inferential reasoning to either deductive or inductive. This is related to item No. 1 above.

3. Black people tend to prefer approximations to accuracy to "fifty decimal places." This is related to No. 1 above.

4. Black people tend to prefer a focus on people and their activities rather than things. The choice by so many students of the helping professions such as teaching, psychology, social work, and so forth cannot be explained by job availability or ease of curriculum.

5. Black people have a keen sense of justice and are quick to analyze and perceive injustice.

6. Black people tend to lean toward altruism, a concern for one's fellow man.

7. Black people tend to prefer opportunities for stylistic display within the parameters of what the reference group thinks is hip.

8. Black people tend to prefer novelty and freedom. Witness the development of improvisations in music, styles in clothing, and so forth.

9. Black people in general tend not to be language dependent. That is to say, there is a tendency to favor non-

verbal as well as verbal communications. Words may be used as much to set a mood as to convey specific data.

If these assumptions and educated guesses are even partially accurate, it should be clear that the schools we find most often are unready to be helpful to many children.

Resources for Change

"The security guards are back in Harlem now because the teachers are back. They were absent all summer while the children were in Harlem without their teachers. They are back to protect the teachers. Chances are the security guards were educated by the same people who trained the teachers." (Preston Wilcox)

Schools do not have to be the places that they are for minority students. Special educators occupy unique positions to have an impact in positive directions. But systematic problems require systematic solutions. I believe the following directions offer some hope:

1. A racially representative staff, not for the purpose of benevolent affirmative action but to enhance the capacity of schools to deal with all children. Minority staff are likely to enrich perspective. In cases where tenure prevents this enrichment, minority consultants must be utilized in on going programs on a regular basis.

2. There is a systematic blindness on the part of mainstream professionals regarding the matter of professional literature and related literature by minorities. There can be no forgiveness for the mainstream professional who fails to consult this vital literature for ideas and for understanding of the minority perspective. How long will Dubois, Fanon, Robert Williams, Thomas Hilliard, Robert Green, Preston Wilcox, Jose Cruz, Charles Bustamonte, Tom Arcienega, Charles Willie, William Grier, Andy Lillingshley, and others go unreferenced, unread, unused by so many educators who need them. Any serious professionals in special education who purport to serve minority students are professionally remiss if they fail to utilize this growing resource of minority talent.

3. Non-minority writers with demonstrated expertise in facilitating growth among minority populations or showing an understanding based upon direct experiences must also be read. There is no excuse for functional professional illiteracy among us.

4. A growing number of minority professional associa-

tions or caucuses within regular professional associations exist. These offer a direct point of contact for professionals in special education. Organizations such as the Black Child Development Institute in Washington, D.C., The National Association of Black Psychologists, the National Medical Association, the Association of Black Social Workers, the Association for Non-White Concerns, and the American Personnel and Guidance Association, the Association of Chinese Teachers, La Raza Associations, and many others too numerous to mention, should be a part of the everyday repertoire of any serious professional in programs for special education which serve large percentages of minority students. Personnel referral and bibliographies are available from these sources.

5. Especially in large urban areas where large numbers of minority students are served, direct continuing contact with professional and other community leadership is essential. It is especially important that the help of parents in programs where classification and labeling is done be assured.

Roles for Leaders—Leader-administrators in special education have special responsibilities where minority children are concerned in light of some of the considerations which were discussed above. Some of these special roles are as follows:

1. To act as advocates for relevant research and to improve the skills of teachers and parents in reading, understanding, and applying relevant research. To refuse to participate in or support research on minorities which does not follow HEW guidelines on informed consent.

2. Leaders must enlist the help of minority professionals and those who have had success in promoting the growth of minorities, to diagnose and change curriculum in line with what we know about our children.

3. Leaders must insure that accurate pupil diagnosis is done. The most important contribution a leader can make in this area is to look beyond the paper qualifications of those who do pupil diagnosis to determine their competence for working with minority children and to insure that only those who are qualified carry out these important tasks.

4. Leaders must insure professional responsibility in the use of labels and categories. Specifically, time must be

set aside periodically to evaluate the constructs covered by labels and the setting in which labels are applied to insure the appropriateness of labels and categories.

5. Leaders must insure accurate communication with children and parents regarding findings.

6. Leaders have a particular responsibility in the area of insuring quality control in the delivery of special education services. In many cases, poor program results are due less to the fact we don't know what to do than to the fact we don't do what we know. I have discovered many teachers who work with students in special education and who carry the responsibilities of a specialist but who have not received adequate training for their role. Competency with children must be demonstrated.

7. Leaders must insure that no special educator works alone in the above, but has peer feedback all along.

Conclusion

The definition of student needs, student problems, and student prospects determine the kind of curriculum, the kind of staffing, the kind of evaluation and training of teachers which will occur. If these important definitions are to be handled properly, they must be made by people who have requisite skills and who value kids who are different from themselves—and above all, can be comfortable with the differences. The school is not a factory, the school is not a business. Unlike businesses and factories, the essential functioning of the school is dependent, not only on technical expertise, but on how professionals feel about the children that they serve. Indifference, benign neglect, or clinical detachment will guarantee failure. The special teachers which make special education special are those who bring both skills such as those mentioned above and love, not fear, of the human beings they serve to the teaching encounter. Anything less will make the special educator a part of the problem rather than a part of the solution.